

"Much of the history we teach
was made by people we taught."

WEST POINT:



DEVELOPING LEADERS FOR TOMORROW

By Glen Slattery and Glen Staron
Photography by Jerry Siegel

Talk about an alumni association. Across 200 years the United States Military Academy at West Point has produced a roster of graduates including Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, George S. Patton, Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower – history makers all.

But West Point, N.Y., is more than an educational institution and a historic landmark. It is also a military community of some 14,000 people with its own zip code, school system, fire department – and a rising generation of children. As the Academy celebrates its bicentennial, these young people represent history in the making.

Enter West Point Youth Services. For many kids with Army parents, the Boys & Girls Club affiliate is the next best thing to home. In a world where three-year tours of duty take military families around the globe, the Youth Center is a place to make friends, learn or just be yourself.

West Point Youth Services has been providing programs for military youth for more than 30 years, and been in Boys & Girls Clubs of America membership since 1998. It's part of a larger partnership with the Army – and the entire U.S. military – that has the full support of Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. William J. Lennox Jr.

"I believe it is essential for military installations to help support Boys & Girls Clubs of America," says Gen. Lennox. "It's a great organization with proven success at helping develop children of our military families into great young men and women. And the feedback I get from the West Point community is that our Youth Services program here is one of the most valuable services we provide."

An Open Door

There are myriad recreational, cultural and learning opportunities for young people on the 16,000-acre West Point campus. As the Army's college it offers a number of facilities – including a wide array of sports fields and an ice hockey rink – that children of military personnel have a chance to enjoy.

On an average day more than 100 of those young people can be found in the brick building that is home to the West Point Youth Center. From the 15-screen soundproofed computer center to the chess club and the 180-gallon aquarium, there's something for everyone.

"It's always fun to come in," says Tom, 14. "A lot of kids come here to make new friends."

His sentiments are shared by 16-year-old Jeremy: "There are so many things to do, you have pool tables and basketball, and the door is always open."

Most young people in membership at the Youth Center – some 1,600 of them from 800 families – have a parent stationed at West Point. For those in the volunteer Army, it's a huge plus knowing their children have a safe place to go after school.

"If there's a good family environment, soldiers are more likely to re-enlist," says Donald Hulst, Youth Services director at West Point. "And when their families are taken care of, soldiers focus better on their mission."

That mission is worldwide, and Boys & Girls Clubs of America – in partnership with military Youth Centers – are providing stability and continuity for young people whose mothers and fathers serve in the armed forces.

"Before being stationed at West Point, my family lived in two other states," says 14-year-old Anna. "On each base there's always a Youth Center, so no matter where you go, you'll have a place."



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Building on a Mission

Ever since President Thomas Jefferson authorized creation of a U.S. Military Academy on bluffs above the Hudson River in 1802, West Point has been known for its commitment to the values of: "Duty, Honor, Country." A belief abides there that it is not enough to train leaders – they must also have integrity and character.

The Academy has a Youth Center which builds on that principle. The vast majority of kids there will go on to college, including several each year who join the 4,000-member Corps of Cadets. In addition, some cadets – young women and men from all 50 states who graduate West Point as commissioned second lieutenants for a minimum five years on active duty – serve as tutors and role models for West Point children. It's part of a seamless relationship between the military community and the Youth Center.

"We're well-received and we're proud of that," Hulst says. "West Point represents leadership, and we try to help the children here grow and learn to take their own places as leaders in society."

What's more, the Youth Center is a good neighbor – conducting sports exchange programs with more than 100 area communities and working with area Boys & Girls Clubs to enhance the quality of Club services for all kids in the area.

"We are thrilled to support this partnership by sharing ideas and best practices," says Mary Himic, West Point's chief of Family Support. "And with a community that supports youth the way ours does, we're sure to succeed."



In Context

The range of educational, character and leadership development programs offered by Boys & Girls Clubs of America makes it a natural partner with Youth Centers serving children from military families.

The first Youth Centers became member organizations of B&GCA in 1995, a collaboration that has grown with support from the Department of Defense to include all branches of the U.S. armed forces. In 15 countries – from Italy and Bahrain to Turkey and Japan – and at 231 locations within the United States – military Youth Centers offer the Boys & Girls Club experience to more than 171,000 young people in membership.

"Youth Centers have a huge and positive impact on military communities," says the Army's Gen. Lennox. "They provide the programs and facilities that are vital to maintaining a good quality of life for military families – especially in remote or overseas locations."

Youth Centers/Boys & Girls Clubs in Military Communities Worldwide

Air Force	Marines
103	22
Army	Navy
178	60

Total: 363

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